EXISTENCE.

I am venturing to put forward for your consideration a few remarks on "Existence," because it appears to me that many questions of no little importance have been unduly complicated by too crude an idea of "existence."

In discussing different kinds of existence, it will be convenient first to discuss that kind of existence which is significantly predicable of what are called "sense-particulars." I will call this first kind of existence "primary existence." Primary existence is always implied in the naming of anything. Thus one cannot give a proper name to anything not having primary existence. But this kind of primary existence which can, I think, significantly be predicated of sense-particulars must be carefully distinguished from reality and non-reality, which are sometimes asserted of the same kind of thing. To call one's own sense-data real in waking life and unreal in dreams is not to be identified with asserting primary existence of some of one's sense-data, and not of others. All our sense-data have equally primary existence. Why we call some real and some unreal is because some give the usual kind of correlation with other sense-data, and some do not. Ghosts which cannot be touched are "unreal." Macbeth's dagger is "unreal" because the correlation with sense-data of touch which one has learned to expect, does not in fact occur in these cases. It may be, on the other hand, that the matter of correlation is merely unusual, as for example if one dreamt night after night of a certain object being at a certain place: i. e., if one's sense-data were correlated in a certain way. Then if one went to the place at which the sense-data ordinarily would have led one to expect to see certain sense-data correlated with the others in a particular way, one might not experience such a sense-datum. Again, if in what is called "waking life" one saw sense-data at different times which one could correlate by saying that they all belong to the sun, one would probably see certain sense-data as expected at other times; but if the sense-data had only been given in dreams, any reference of that kind would very probably be fallacious. Thus sense-data are said to be unreal when inferences usually true turn out to be false. Thus while it appears essential to predicate primary existence of all sense-data with which we are

acquainted, sense-data can be said to be real or unreal in a definite sense.

The things which make up the outside world appear to be particulars and facts. Facts therefore have a kind of existence, which we will call "primary existence of facts," but which is not of the same kind as that for particulars: for the intrinsic nature of facts is different from the nature of particulars, and in view of their intrinsically different natures, the same property cannot significantly be predicated of both. As far as one can see, this apparatus of particulars and facts is adequate for the building up of empirical knowledge. Thus, we do not postulate existence of the primary kind to any other objects of our thought. We do not assume primary existence for physical objects and points and other non-experienced things.

Having considered briefly the crude data given empirically, we have to build up the other objects of thought by means of logical construction. It would perhaps be advisable to state shortly what appears to be the essence of this method. The problem for the solution of which this method is to be used is as follows. Certain things are given in experience—sense-particulars of various kinds and facts. We then wish to find other terms, such that in analyzing any proposition in which they occur, they themselves do not occur, but only the things which are given in experience. At the same time, these terms are to have certain definite properties. Then although a term a (say) appears in a proposition ϕa yet it will be possible to analyze ϕa into a proposition not containing a if a stand for a logical construction. In this way we shall be able to use propositions apparently containing a without in any way prejudging whether a is a thing having primary existence or not.

It is of extreme importance that we should be able to do this, for it has been held that in the proposition, e. g.,

"the round square does not exist"

what is asserted is that there is an entity which is round and square, and it has the property of not existing. This, however, is an unsatisfactory interpretation, and a better one can be given as Mr. Russell has shown, viz., "It is not the case that there is a thing both round and square." The "round square" appears to be a constituent of the original proposition and in the proposition some property seems to be predicated of this fictitious object. But with

Mr. Russell's theory of "incomplete symbols," the proposition is analyzed in such a way that the object disappears.

Another example may make the point clearer: the well-worn topic of points in geometry seems to provide a good illustration. We have given in experience sense-data of different sizes, but all these sense-data have some magnitude: one never directly apprehends a sense-datum which could be said to be a point, in the ordinarily understood geometrical sense of the word. Yet propositions apparently containing points occur: in fact by using points with entire and childlike trust the geometers have been able to predict the occurrence of sense-data with startling accuracy: the geometer is in the somewhat paradoxical position of deducing certain propositions apparently containing things like points from empirical data: and further his propositions, although expressed in the, empirically speaking, obscure terminology of points and instants, have the elegant property of being such that there is an interpretation in terms of sense-data which makes them verifiable. Thus, for instance, the physicist proves to his own satisfaction that an object will fall to the ground if not held up: this statement, it is interesting to observe, is in terms of things which appear to be entirely unknown in experience: one cannot, it would appear, directly apprehend a physical object. Further, it is very probable that one cannot verify the motion completely; for having certain physical limitations we cannot possibly "see the object" at every point of its path, unless space has an *extraordinary* degree of discreteness. However closely we look, it seems probable that we shall miss many intermediate positions—in fact, if space has even the mildest form of continuity, we shall always miss infinitely more positions than we shall see—and I use the word "infinitely" in a strict sense. But we shall find that if we look at a certain place at a certain time, we shall have the sensation called "seeing the object there." Thus the physicist formulates a system apparently based on empirical evidence, but which is expressed in obscure terms like instants, points, etc., which no one, I think, would venture to suggest are given in experience. The extraordinary success of physics in predicting occurrences of sense-data rather points to the fact that these unexperienceable things such as points and instants have at least a pragmatic function of providing a useful terminology. Now the method of logical constructions offers a solution of this paradox. If we can construct points (say) out of sense-data, we shall be able

to understand how it is that they work in a science which is founded on empirical data. To a certain extent this has definitely been done by Mr. Russell and Professor Whitehead. It would appear that it is now possible to construct things which have the properties of points etc., and which are such that propositions in which they occur can be expressed entirely in terms of sense-data. It is only possible to get a discrete space out of sense-data actually experienced; but it is, of course, a mere prejudice that we should always imagine space to be continuous. It is a somewhat technical matter how exactly this can be done; but my point is that there is an important problem to be solved, and that this method appears to indicate a solution, and further, as I will now try to show, the whole point of the matter lies in the kind of existence which can be significantly predicated of points, instants, etc., on purely empirical grounds. William of Occam appears to have been a philosopher of some importance, but the most striking thing which is now coupled with his name is "Occam's razor"—and this wonderfully subtle methodological axiom, it is sad to find, is not really due to William of Occam at all. Occam's razor states that "entities are not to be multiplied without necessity." The extreme importance of this principle is generally maintained among logicians of a certain school and should, I think, be more universally recognized to be of fundamental importance. The essence of the principle lies in postulating primary existence of the fewest possible number of kinds of things necessary to explain the facts: then the method of logical constructions will allow us apparently to use entities in propositions without in advance giving them primary existence. The essential point about these logical constructions is that propositions in which they occur can be made to dissolve again into their constituent elements, all of which have primary existence. Thus, for example, suppose one says two straight lines cannot enclose a space, one does not immediately assume primary existence for lines etc., for lines of the most common and conventional geometrical variety having no thickness are not given in ordinary experience. Rather we look around for what is given, and logically construct them from these data. We are given sense-data of varying sizes, and by taking classes of these data all enclosing some of the others, we can with some elegant manipulations logically construct a point; i. e., we can find classes of sense-data which have all the properties which geometry requires of points. Then with the help of some ideas of

order which are given in experience, one can get a line, and so on. In this way we *construct* a line. But its existence is not the kind of existence possessed by the sense-data out of which it is constructed. It is of such an ephemeral nature that if one looks closely at propositions in which it occurs, it will disappear and only sense-data will be left. It does not belong to the world of sensation: it cannot be touched or seen. It is not verifiable in sense and has the same kind of existence as the fairies of our childhood, which disappeared when we turned round to look at them more closely. Of course it would be just as great an error of logical taste to assert dogmatically that points etc., have not got primary existences, as to assert dogmatically that they have: it would in fact be a logical mistake fundamentally of the same kind. Occam's razor does not advocate that. One leaves open the possibility of points and non-experienced things having primary experience: but just as it is an error of logical style to assert the existence of things unnecessarily, so it is an error not to draw all the implications of the given data. That is to say: one does not assert the existence of points, as there does not seem to be any necessity for such an assertion for a satisfactory explanation of the given proposition: next, of course, one does not assert the non-existence of these things, but further one would assert that the given material is insufficient for such an assertion, and that therefore those who make such an assertion either have some private channel of knowledge, to which we have not got access, or are making the assertion on insufficient grounds.

In these few remarks I have tried to show that the question of "existence" is intimately connected with the logical treatment of epistemological questions of no little importance: that is my excuse for attacking the question. It appears to me not unlikely that a less crude idea of existence will give greater scope in the kinds of terms that one can use in propositions; and further more particularly that Mr. Russell's brilliant method of logical constructions, and its bearing on the existence of terms involved in propositions, at least indicates the direction in which the solutions of many epistemological questions of fundamental importance may be considerably advanced.

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